

Get a Taste of Jamaica

The island continues to blossom as a destination for extraordinary **epicurean adventures**.

BY JANEEN JOHNSON



From street fairs to week-long celebrations of the finest food and spirits, there's never been a more exciting time to feast locally. As the culinary landscape expands, tastemakers continue to push the boundaries that define Jamaican cuisine. I travelled across the island to visit a few chefs who are making a mark on the local food scene. They shared their views on Jamaican food, as well as recommendations to help inspire your personal culinary tour.

Dennis McIntosh Grand-A-View Restaurant

Dennis McIntosh is an award-winning chef with over 30 years of international culinary experience. He's the executive chef at Grand-A-View Restaurant, Montego Bay's newest fine dining establishment. Grand-A-View combines global cuisine with a distinct Jamaican flair paired with breathtaking views of the island's resort capital.

"I see myself as an ambassador who pushes Jamaican cuisine because it's important that we keep it authentic but at the same time understand that there's an evolution that continues to take place," says Chef McIntosh.

"We're blessed with seasonality and good agricultural land that gives us something to work with each month of the year." He believes that the abundance of quality produce makes

Jamaica a prime destination for gastronomy.

"My signature dish is anything that's fresh and local. I love tuna, wahoo or marlin right off the boat." He also enjoys having a Red Stripe beer and roast yam in Trelawney.

"For a true Jamaican experience, have a beef patty and jerk pork. If you're adventurous, try soursop and naseberry," he suggests. "It makes sense to support the local farming community, as the flavour is far superior to anything that we can import."

Maurice Henry, Jamaica Inn

Chef Maurice Henry credits the climate and the quality of the soil for the superior taste of local cuisine. "The sun, rain and soil combination adds to that end product," he says. "If you compare our fruits to those abroad, ours will be sweeter."

For the last 14 years, the executive chef has been making his mark at the prestigious Jamaica Inn, Ocho Rios. The boutique hotel features two restaurants on property that serve an international fare with a Jamaican twist. The menu incorporates a boneless curry goat and freshly caught fish like red snapper and grouper. "My signature dish is any kind of sea food," says Chef Henry. "Food is an experience that can ruin your vacation. If you travel and the food is not up to par then you'll waste time searching for places to eat."

Jamaica Inn offers immersive culinary experiences both on and off property. The Shop and Cook Tour, takes guests to a nearby market to learn about local produce. It incorporates a cooking demonstration and sampling of a popular local dish. There's also a Spice and Fruit tour. Another unique offering is the All-inclusive Meal Package, which gives guests the opportunity to dine at select restaurants in Ocho Rios.

On his personal time, Chef Henry enjoys pan chicken, curries and



mannish water — a soup made with goat’s head and belly.

“To get a true taste of the island’s flavours, you must try ackee and saltfish, along with a few side dishes like festival and bammy.”

Marianna Farag Marianna’s Kitchen

“Ingredients here are really exceptional, everything is more flavourful,” says Marianna Farag. “As someone who cooks, I’m more in for a treat here than I would be in the city of Paris. The quality of the ingredients is better than I would get in a big European city.”

Farag operates a plant-based open kitchen concept eatery in Kingston. Her story and multi-ethnic background is as colourful and diverse as her recipes. She’s a Greek-born, half-Egyptian, half-Syrian French citizen turned Jamaican resident. Her passion for food is for food is influenced by the women in her family and deeply rooted in her upbringing. “In Middle Eastern culture, every exchange happens around food,” she says. “I wanted to recreate that feeling of my childhood kitchen when I was growing up.”

“My cuisine is colourful, innovative and exciting plant-based food. Expect something different every day.”

Farag and her team are on a mission to make all their guests fall in love with eating vegetables.

When she’s not experimenting in her kitchen, Farag enjoys exploring the small colourful shops around the island. She’s also fascinated by Jamaica’s roots wine and herbal culture.

She has an earnest recommendation for visitors. “Try all the fruits: sweetsop, breadfruit, peppers, condiments and everything that you can’t find in your own country.”

To plan your own culinary adventure, start by downloading the Taste Jamaica app. To attend food festivals, brunches and other culinary events on the island visit topeventsinjamaica.com/food, and rent a car from Island Car Rentals to get to your destination.

